Dogs in Dutch Media: Exploring Public Opinion As A Step Toward Solving Dog Welfare Problems

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Abstract

Dogs are considered humans' best friend, but this relationship is not all puppies and sunshine. Zoonoses, biting incidents, hereditary problems, and other welfare issues can threaten the relationship, especially when humans are not aware of them. Public opinion on dogs in the densely populated Netherlands was therefore examined. Dutch newspapers and Facebook were analyzed with frame analysis. A positive view of dogs seems predominant, followed by one that sees dogs as normal, while problems with dogs are less common. That dogs are considered close to humans is exemplified by the

found norms that the needs of dogs must be met, that severe penalties must be applied when humans do not respect the welfare of dogs, and that dog keepers and conditions are responsible for problems with dogs. The image of the dog as ordinary may hinder public awareness, despite the norms that emphasize the importance of dog welfare.

Keywords

behavior modification – social influence – dogs in society – human-dog relationship

The coexistence of humans and dogs has been a matter of mutual benefit since the last Ice Age (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003), where domestication may have been influenced by humans only moderately and for the most part involved unconscious selection pressures (Coppinger & Coppinger, 2002). This changed in the past few centuries where explicit artificial breeding of dogs took over (Lynch, 2019). In the present time, excesses in (pedigree) dog breeding led to dogs with severe health and behavioral problems (Oldenbroek & Windig, 2012). A behavioral problem, whatever the cause, that affects humans, dogs, and other non-human animals is biting. In The Netherlands, registration of biting incidents is largely lacking, especially for dog–dog and dog–other nonhuman animal incidents. Registration of dogs biting humans is not watertight, but 150,000 incidents per year are estimated (Cornelissen & Hopster, 2008) and the subject has the attention of Dutch governmental bodies (Dutch Council for Animal Affairs, 2017; Nijenhuis et al., 2017).

The Netherlands is a densely populated country. The human population consists of around 17.5 million people (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2021) on 33.671 km² of land, which makes it the most densely populated country on the mainland of Europe. The Netherlands is not only densely populated in humans; 25.3 million companion animals also contribute to the population, of which 1.9 million are dogs (Piksen, 2020). With human and nonhuman animals sharing a relatively small space, emphasis on peaceful coexistence for all species is important. Not surprisingly under these circumstances, The Netherlands has had a Dutch Council for Animal Affairs since 1993, which is grounded in nonhuman animal legislation (Jacobs & Theunissen, 2018).

Zoonotic diseases in such a densely populated country are always a concern (Smit & Heederik, 2017), and this concern is fueled by the import of dogs from Southern and Eastern European countries to accommodate the growing demand for dogs (Piksen, 2020). Zoonotic diseases, such as Rabies and Brucellosis, are endemic in countries from where the imported dogs originate,

which is cause for concern for the Dutch government (Dijksma, 2014). The circumstances in which these dogs are bred and kept add to this concern, especially in illegal dog trafficking (NVWA, 2016). Illegal dog trafficking is considered a problem throughout Europe, with dog welfare, the spread of diseases, evasion of identification and registration laws, and tax evasion as problematic components (Eurogroup for Animals, 2020). The lack of socialization of foreign dogs can cause behavioral problems which harm both dogs and humans (Freedman et al, 1961).

Risk prevention begins with well-informed acquisition of a dog. Several measures already aim to accomplish this. Since 2013, all "new" dogs in The Netherlands must be RFID-chipped and registered to prevent illegal and malicious dog trafficking. Additionally, effective rabies vaccination for dogs entering The Netherlands is obligatory. Unfortunately, morbidity consequent to other avoidable illnesses and illegal trade still exists (Van Rijt et al., 2016). For a long time, information campaigns have aimed to increase (potential) dog keepers' awareness of the risks associated with dogs. Governmental agencies as well as kennel clubs and non-governmental agencies regard providing knowledge as the crucial step in empowering people to make educated decisions. However, as the problems continue (NVWA, 2016), the effectiveness of the approach needs to be further improved. The extent to which the acquisition of a dog is guided by deliberative processes and subconscious decision-making is, however, largely unknown.

According to Kahneman (2012), people tend to rationalize decisions after the decision has been made instead of beforehand. The actual decision has by then obviously already been made, probably impulsively. This phenomenon is illustrated by Pompe et al.'s (2012) study concerning the purchase of high-risk companion animals. In this study, companion animals are considered high-risk if they are known to suffer in health or welfare from breeding or keeping. Ninety-five percent of dog keepers considered buying their high-risk dog again, knowing the health and welfare consequences. An increase in knowledge (as provided by their experience) had apparently not influenced their decision-making. Another explanation could be that people decide to buy a high-risk dog again because they consider other values to be more important. Sandøe et al. (2017) found this regarding dogs with hereditary problems, where the keepers were actually more inclined to purchase the same breed of dog. The attachment to the dog was probably enforced by the extensive care the dog needed.

Insight is therefore needed into the way people decide to acquire a dog, especially when non-deliberate and impulsive behavior is involved, as a step toward new ways to promote better decision-making when acquiring dogs. As

self-control can be viewed as a value-based choice (Berkman et al., 2017), it is important to understand the values that influence people's choice in acquiring dogs. Berkman et al. (2017) explain how values are assigned to all possible options and weighed in a dynamic process. In this process, an autonomously motivated goal may be outvalued by the convenience of a quick decision. Careless choices entail the risk of a dog keeper's knowledge, skills, needs, and home situation not matching the dog's needs and characteristics (Jagoe & Serpell, 1996). Careless choices can, for example, be triggered by dogs' visual appearance, their tough image, or sad eyes.

The (potential) dog keeper's social environment, including prevailing values and norms, is likely to play a significant role (Herzog, 2006; Smith & Christakis, 2008). This can include the direct environment, but also virtual networks (social media) and society at large. Values and norms are factors influencing the perception humans construct (Te Velde et al., 2002). The focus of this study was therefore to gain more knowledge of public opinion on dogs in The Netherlands by identifying values and norms regarding dogs in Dutch media, for which reason the following research question was formulated: What values and norms regarding dogs are found in Dutch media between 2007 and 2017?

This study adopts Te Velde et al.'s (2002) broad definition that values are opinions about the way things should be and the translation of the values into rules of conduct are norms for proper behavior. The combination of values and norms constitutes public opinion in this study.

Materials and Methods

The starting point for this research is that public opinion influences acquisition decisions, and media discourse is argued to be an essential context for understanding the formation of public opinion (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Media discourse is viewed as both a reflection of public opinion (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; McCombs, 2014) and a crucial influence on public opinion formation (Ghirlanda et al., 2014; Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997). Both perspectives support this study without the necessity to distinguish between them.

This study was interpretative; the assumption was that the world can be interpreted in many ways (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). The keyword "framing" was crucial in this process: When people frame situations and experiences, they emphasize certain aspects at the expense of others (Dewulf et al., 2009). Framing determines how meaning is given to facts and figures and the goals striven for in interaction. These goals can entail the justification of an acquisition, but also the way people view themselves and others, for example,

as dog lovers. Frame analysis was used to reveal implicit and explicit values and norms in Dutch society regarding dogs.

Quantitative Analysis

Two types of media were used in the quantitative analysis: newspapers and social media. Since written media is well-archived, it is accessible for analysis over a long period. Despite the declining popularity of traditional media such as newspapers, they still hold a strong position in the media landscape in The Netherlands. Within Europe, The Netherlands has a relatively high distribution of newspapers per 100 inhabitants, and its newspaper landscape has a large variety in target groups. Over the past decade however, there has been a shift toward an older audience for newspapers (Bakker, 2013). Facebook, as the largest social media platform, was therefore added to ensure a broad-based media analysis. According to Hayes et al. (2015), younger adults use Facebook more frequently than older adults and are more emotionally impacted by it. In 2017, Facebook was most popular in the 15–39-year-old age group (Van der Veer et al., 2018)

Messages including the word *hond* or *hondje* (Dutch for dog and doggie) in the following media were analyzed:

– The three largest national daily newspapers: *Algemeen Dagblad* (AD, reach: 1,177,000), *Telegraaf* (reach: 1,150,000), and *Volkskrant* (660,000)
– Two regional daily newspapers: *Dagblad van het Noorden* (95,202) and *De Stentor/Gelders Dagblad* (96,008; Nationaal Onderzoek Multimedia, 2019)
– Social media: Facebook (10,800,000 Dutch users; van der Veer et al., 2018)

This selection provided enough data for both quantitative and qualitative analysis of a wide demographic. To ascertain the variety of public opinions, messages were also analyzed over time.

The timeframe chosen for the newspapers was a 10-year period from which three years were selected: 2007, 2012, and 2017, as a five-year interval is considered common in social sciences (Ruspini, 2002). In these years, January, April, July, and October were selected to correct for or discover seasonal effects. For Facebook, July-December 2017 was selected, as Facebook use increased dramatically compared with previous years and the content could be obtained over a longer period of time.

All newspaper articles containing the words *hond* or *hondje* in the LexisNexis newspaper database were coded, except when *hond* had nothing to do with the animal or the way it is viewed (e.g., when a name contained *hond*). All hits were categorized; in the first 200 hits, new categories were created when no suitable category existed. After this, no hits were found that could not be allotted to an existing category. Co-coding was especially valuable at the beginning of

the coding process to establish a common meaning of the categories (Busetto, 2020). Three students was assigned to code two of three months that had been coded by the researcher, such that each student shared one month with each of the other students. In that way, each of the three months was coded by three coders: the researcher and two students. Comparisons across codings were discussed among the four individuals, and disagreements were clarified. Then the three students each coded one of three months that had been coded by the researcher and reached full agreement after a final discussion. This process resulted in a clear division between the categories.

We used a Generalized Estimating Effect (GEE) model with a negative binomial error and a log link function (SPSS 26.0) to determine whether the average number of published articles per month differed ($p \leq .05$) per category, per month and per year. GEE makes it possible to adjust for the dependence of the observations of the different categories in the same period. Due to the limited size of the dataset, interactions have been omitted. Pairwise comparisons were performed with a Sidak correction. The differences ($p \leq .05$) in distribution of items over categories between newspapers and Facebook was tested using the Chi square test.

For Facebook, the top 100 messages in terms of reach were selected with the program Meltwater® (Meltwater Group, Oslo, Norway) for six months consecutively. These messages had the largest reach during that month, meaning the highest number of different Facebook accounts was exposed to these messages. These top 100 messages were scanned to assign them to one of the same categories used for newspapers.

Qualitative Analysis

Categories that related to problems concerning dogs were selected for qualitative analysis. As the Facebook selection did not provide additional information in those categories, frame analysis was performed solely on the newspaper articles. A quick scan provided four frame categories as a starting point: "regulations," "services," "behavior of humans," and "anthropomorphism." Each year of data was then analyzed by two researchers independently. Differences in analysis were discussed until consensus was achieved.

As the objective of this research was to gain more insight into values and norms regarding dogs in Dutch society, the analysis focused on values and norms that could be derived from the articles. Values were defined as opinions about the way things should be and norms were defined as the translations of these values into rules of conduct (Te Velde et al., 2002). These could be either explicit values and norms, formulated in the article as such, or implicit values

and norms that could be derived from the formulation in the article. Together, the quantitative trend analysis and the qualitative frame analysis provided insight into the values and norms regarding dogs in Dutch society.

Results

Quantitative Results
Newspapers
In total, 2,746 newspaper articles were analyzed. If an article contained more than one category the article was counted each time a category was assigned, leading to 2,855 categorized articles. The categories distinguished are:

1. Relationship. A specific dog with a specific relation with a specific person or a specific place in society:
   The word "dog" is combined with the name of the dog and/or specific characteristics, such as breed or appearance, but also the dog's character traits. In these cases, the relationship with the dog is mentioned, the meaning of the dog to the person in the article. For example, "Her little dog Bus lies in a guitar case. She uses him conveniently to fill up the silences between the songs with some chitter chatter" (*Telegraaf*, 2007).

2. Normalcy. Dog as a metaphor for a state of normalcy:
   The word "dog" is used to emphasize how normal a situation or a person is or seems to be. The use of the word is in a more abstract form, not necessarily referring to a specific dog. Typical phrases found in this category are "just walking the dog," "taking the dog out for a stroll," or "petting the dog." For example, "Since then I'm really feeling better. I'm walking the dog in the forest again. Lovely" (AD, 2007).

3. Proverb. Dog in proverbs or used as metaphors:
   Proverbs mentioning dogs are part of the Dutch language. The use of the word dog is in a more abstract form, not referring to a (specific) dog. Proverbs found combine the use of dog with a negative sensation, such as cowardly (*laffe hond*), or with a positive sensation, such as loyal (*trouwe hond*). For example, "I long for not having to get up in time and go home like a scared dog" (AD, 2007).

4. Nuisance. Dog related to nuisance:
   Dogs are seen as a source of nuisance, including dogs straying on railways, in airports, and on highways, barking, biting human and nonhuman animals. For example, "The dog attacked two women and an employee of the animal rescue service" (AD, 2007).

5.   Abuse. Dog abuse:
       This category features dogs who are victimized. This can be either unin-
       tentional or intentional. For example, "He stabbed the dog multiple times
       with a letter opener and hit him on the head with a hammer" (*Telegraaf*,
       2007).
6.   Special accomplishments. Dog related to special accomplishments:
       Special accomplishments by dogs include unusual performances, finding
       missing persons, saving someone/someone's life by alerting others, play-
       ing a part in solving crimes, and assisting people in need. Mostly, these
       referrals are made to specific dogs, sometimes in official capacities such
       as army dogs, police dogs, assistance dogs. For example, "Agata isn't just a
       dog. She's one of the best drug sleuths in Colombia" (*De Stentor/Gelders
       Dagblad*, 2007).

The average number of articles, assigned to the different categories, differed
significantly ($p \leq .05$) between most categories as shown in Figure 1. The rela-
tionship category was significantly larger than all the other categories. The
normalcy category and the proverb category were significantly larger than the
special accomplishments, nuisance, and dog abuse categories. The nuisance
and dog abuse categories did not differ significantly. What can be derived from
these findings is that people value relationships with dogs and consider dogs to
be mainly a positive influence in their lives. On the other hand, the normalcy
category emphasized the value of the dog as the representative of a normal
state of being; this was corroborated by proverbs that mentioned dogs. Both
were clearly present in Dutch newspapers.

    In newspapers, the use of proverbs, either negative or positive, with dogs
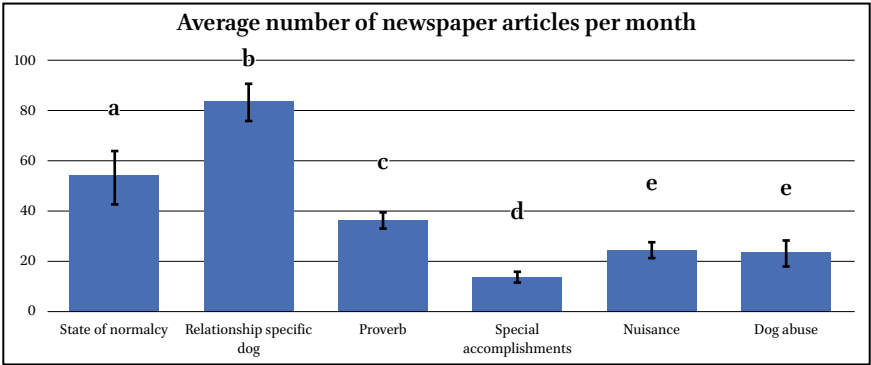seemed to be very consistent over time. In the nuisance category, there was a

FIGURE 1   Adjusted Percentages of Newspaper Articles per Month per Category
             Note: Different letters on top of columns indicate significant differences at $p \leq .05$.

small, not significant increase, and the special accomplishments varied, but no trend could be determined. Moreover, there were various forms in the nuisance category: barking, biting other dogs, biting cattle, biting wildlife, biting people, threatening, feces, walking off the leash, lack of registration, zoonoses, allergy, and destroying. The number of dogs reported biting (either humans, dogs, or other nonhuman animals) was counted separately and was significantly lower in 2012 (27) compared to both 2007 (36) and 2017 (49). Complaints about dogs walking off the leash were a solid second in this category in 2007 and 2017, with this nuisance sharing first place with biting in 2012.

The human – dog relationship was the most frequently occurring category in every year. This was also the case in the various months, with a peak in October. The normalcy category peaked in January, as well as proverbs and dog-related nuisance. Dog abuse dipped in April and peaked in July, as shown in Table 1.

"Dog" was mentioned significantly less in April compared to January and July, but the differences between the other months were not significant. Also, some variation was found in the different newspapers, as shown in Table 2.

The relationship category was dominant in most newspapers; *De Volkskrant* was the exception to all other papers except *AD*. In *De Volkskrant*, the normalcy category was more prevalent. Also, proverbs occurred more in this newspaper. These two categories featured the dog in a more abstract form, whereas in the other categories, concrete, individual dogs were featured. Typically, in

TABLE 1 Number of Newspaper Articles Assigned to the Various Categories for Each First Month of Each Quarter Summed up Over the Years 2007, 2012, and 2017

Months Categories	January		April		July		October		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Relationship specific dog	249	24.6	197	19.5	271	26.8	295	29.2	1012	100.0
State of normalcy	203	30.8	161	24.4	147	22.3	148	22.5	659	100.0
Proverb	124	28.3	90	20.5	107	24.4	117	26.7	438	100.0
Nuisance	82	28.0	73	24.9	68	23.2	70	23.9	293	100.0
Dog abuse	73	25.5	46	16.1	103	36.0	64	22.4	286	100.0
Special accomplishments	50	29.9	34	20.4	41	24.6	42	25.1	167	100.0
Total	781	27.3	601	21.0	737	25.8	736	25.8	2855	100.0

Note: Different superscripts within categories illustrate significant differences (p<0.05) between months.

TABLE 2   Percentages of Articles Assigned to the Various Categories for Each of the Five
            Dutch Newspapers, Summed Up (*n*) Over the First Month of Each Quarter and
            Over the Years 2007, 2012, and 2017

Newspapers Categories	*AD* (*n=456*)	*Telegraaf* (*n=610*)	*Volkskrant* (*n=494*)	*Stentor* (*n=611*)	*Dagblad vh Noorden* (*n=684*)
	%	%	%	%	%
Relationship specific dog	34.6[a,b,c]	38.7[c]	26.9[b]	34.9[a,c]	39.8[a,c]
State of normalcy	22.1[a]	21.5[a]	31.8[b]	21.8[a]	20.0[a]
Proverb	18.0[a,b,c]	13.8[c,d]	25.3[b]	12.3[a,c,d]	10.7[d]
Nuisance	8.6[a,b]	7.9[a,b]	5.5[b]	12.4[a,c]	14.8[c]
Dog abuse	10.7[a]	10.5[a]	5.7[b]	12.4[a]	10.2[a,b]
Special accomplishments	5.9[a]	7.7[a]	4.9[a]	6.2[a]	4.5[a]
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Different superscripts within categories illustrate significant differences ($p<0.05$) between newspapers.

the abstract categories, the mention of "dog" was restricted to one sentence, whereas in the other categories more sentences or even the entire article were devoted to the dog. More attention to the individual dog was found in the regional newspapers *Stentor* and *Dagblad van het Noorden,* as well as in *De Telegraaf.* The *Algemeen Dagblad* seemed to be more moderate in the division between abstract and concrete.

Facebook

To gain insight into references to dogs in mass media other than newspapers, Facebook messages were gathered. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the six categories over 100 messages per month with *hond* that had the highest reach.

Analysis of the 600 Facebook posts revealed a prevalence of commercial messages which were virtually absent in the newspaper articles. In these messages, dogs were featured in commercials for products both dog-related (e.g., dogfood) and non-dog-related (e.g., cars). The commercial messages for dog-related products were assigned to the relationship category. This category was therefore even more dominant on Facebook than in newspapers, as shown in Figure 2. The commercial messages for non-dog-related products were more
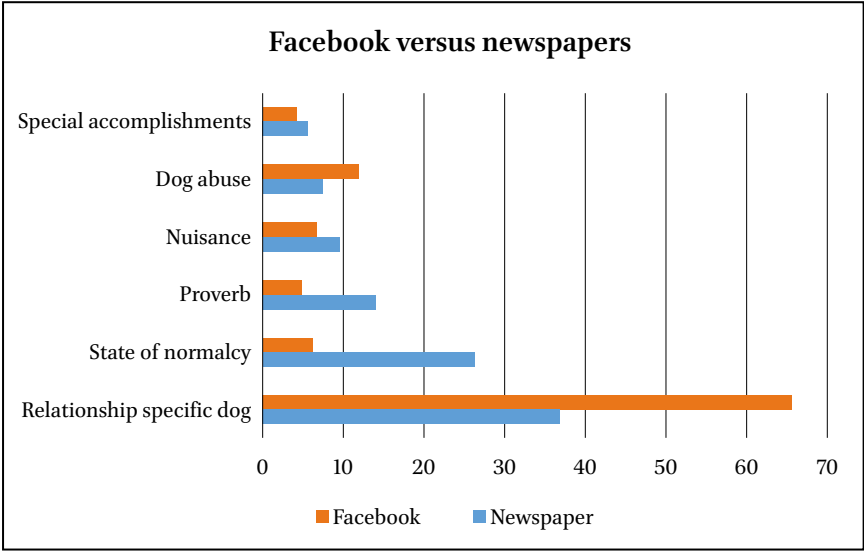
Facebook versus newspapers

FIGURE 2   Distribution of Facebook Messages Over the Six Categories Compared to the
Distribution of Newspaper Articles

complex, as they could fall into the relationship category or the normalcy category, depending on how the dog is featured. If the dog was specifically mentioned in the text of the Facebook message and was not just used as an ornament in an image or video, the hits on "dog" in commercial messages for non-dog-related products were assigned to the relationship category.

The normalcy category and the proverb category were not notably present in the top 100 messages on Facebook. More concrete references to dogs prevailed. Figure 2 shows the greater presence of messages about dog abuse than dog nuisance, whereas in newspapers, no significant difference between the two categories could be established. In both categories, the difference between occurrence in newspapers and on Facebook was significant ($p \leq .05$). The only difference which was not found to be significant in Figure 2 was the category special accomplishments. In the top 100 messages, a substantial number of messages derived from newspapers were found. Most of Facebook's top 100 messages valued the dog in a positive way.

Qualitative Results

The quantitative results provided a direction for qualitative analysis. As the matter of interest was focused on norms derived from the values on dogs, the more abstract representation of dogs was of lesser relevance for further analysis. The focus of the qualitative analysis was therefore in the relationship, abuse, and nuisance categories. These were the categories most connected to

Frames	Examples
Anthropomorphism	"Our chihuahua demands a coffee, watered down, plus half a sandwich with cream cheese daily." 2007, January 24, *AD*
	"My dogs are my children." 2012, January 19, *De Telegraaf*
Services	"The idea is to let the elderly and other volunteers get to work with the dogs. Walking the dogs, cuddling them, grooming and playing with them." 2017, July 31, *De Stentor*
Regulations	"It astounds him that the police is often so ill instructed on the possibilities to act against aggressive dogs." 2017. January 3, *De Volkskrant*
	"Store the chip and a DNA profile of every dog. The police then can sample the dog poo and match it to the owner. The owner has to pay for the procedure and of course a hefty fine." 2012, January 24, *Dagblad van het Noorden*
Human behavior	"Mia's in a divorce. The whole family suffers from the divorce, including pitbull Pepper. Now, she suddenly barks at other children in the street." 2012, July 28, *De Telegraaf*
	"These owners just don't care who's afraid of their dog, they just let him run after you." 2017, April 26, *De Telegraaf*

problems with dogs in The Netherlands, as issues surrounding dog welfare and illegal dog trafficking fell in the abuse or the relationship category, and biting incidents and zoonotic diseases fell in the nuisance category.

From our quick scan we derived four frame categories: "regulations," "services," "behavior of humans," and "anthropomorphism." These are illustrated by the examples in Table 3.

Relationship

In the relationship category, mostly positive relations with dogs and positive effects of dogs on people were reported. A notable frame found in this category was that of anthropomorphism. In several articles, the dog was referred to as "child" or "baby." The attribution of human needs, opinions, or emotions to a dog was frequently found, especially in this category. The right of a dog to be loved summed up this norm. Within this frame, the norm seemed to be that everything one would consider good for a beloved person was also good for one's dog. This included pampering and treating the dog, cuddling the dog,

and performing medical procedures, formerly predominantly used in human medicine, on sick or disabled dogs. Another frame found in this category was the services-frame. The services ranged from gardens to off-leash meadows and daycare for dogs. The norm that corresponded to this frame was that of dogs needing room to run and play.

Abuse

Dogs' needs also played an important role in the abuse category. In all types of intentional and unintentional abuse – which included neglect, over-feeding, drowning, poisoning, burning, stealing/abduction, kicking, cutting, shooting, and strangling – the clear message was that those acts against dogs were all condemnable, and punishment was considered appropriate but, in most cases, not sufficiently possible. Within the regulations-frame, the insufficiency of existing regulations and lack of enforcement was notable. In quite a few cases, dogs were the victim of other dogs biting. Hereditary diseases in pedigree dogs occurred only once in our dataset, and illegal trade in dogs appeared rarely.

Nuisance

Most articles in the nuisance category reported problems with dogs barking and defecating. The emphasis fell on regulations that were or were not in place to prevent nuisance and on the keeper's responsibility. In multiple instances, the distinction between dog and keeper was emphasized by statements like: "It's not the fault of the dog, but of his keeper, who should. ..." Apparently, it was important to state that the dog was not to blame. A norm emerging from this category was that of keeping the dog on a leash. That seemed to be at odds with the norm – which also occurred in articles on nuisance – that dogs need to be able to run and play. Biting dogs were featured in incidents with humans, dogs, and other nonhuman animals. Biting incidents occurred infrequently in the dataset, and it was also noteworthy that the topic of zoonotic diseases occurred just twice.

Explicit and Implicit Norms

Norms were found in different forms. Explicit norms were mentioned in either a formal setting (e.g., in this area, dogs should not be allowed to run unleashed) or an informal one (e.g., dogs should not chase wildlife). Implicit norms were derived from the existence or absence of provisions for dogs (animal ambulance), language that enforced the meaning of an incident (dumped instead of abandoned), and anthropomorphic formulations used in relation to dogs (our dog is our child). Anthropomorphism's contrary was also found, where the emphasis was on "the dog being a dog" (as distinct from a human). The

middle ground was formulations of anthropomorphic signature, with a reference to anthropomorphism as undesirable ("of course it's worse if a dog bites a child, but. …"), therefore labeling anthropomorphism as taboo.

Also found was the undermining of norms, accompanied by suggestions for new norms (abolishing dog tax or initiating a cat or a horse tax). In the relationship and the dog abuse categories, dogs in general had a positive connotation. The value derived from this positive connotation could be formulated as: "dogs are good." This was even substantiated in the category dog nuisance. If problems with dogs occurred, the blame was placed on the keeper, "others," the situation, or the specific breed (as with biting incidents).

In this broad variety of norms, discussion arose about who was enforcing these norms. Formal bodies were mentioned and in particular, the lack of enforcers for matters of both nuisance and abuse. The dog's keeper, who is in many cases the person who should comply with norms, was seen as an informal enforcer, but so were bystanders and neighbors. This was explicitly the case in an article where a neighbor decided to take a dog from his keeper because the treatment of the dog was not up to his standards (*AD*, 2012).

Discussion

This study revealed a predominantly positive view of dogs in Dutch media, with most attention paid to the relationship between humans and dogs. The other important category showed that dogs are very ordinary in The Netherlands, even to the extent that dogs were used to describe just how ordinary a situation was or to show that "everything was normal" ("there is even a dog").

Differences between newspapers in the representation of dogs in articles could be accounted for by differences between the newspapers in general. Boomgaarden et al.'s (2011) research shows that regional newspapers tend to resemble "popular" newspapers such as *AD* and *Telegraaf*, which was confirmed by this research. As expected, there were more hits on nuisance and abuse in the regional newspapers, as such cases were often not considered of national importance, but rather topics of human interest at neighborhood and village level that play an important role in regional papers (Buijs, 2014). Also, "popular" newspapers used more examples of ordinary people when addressing complex subjects (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). In this research, dogs played a more concrete role (relationship, abuse, and nuisance) in these newspapers and a more abstract role (normalcy, proverbs) in "quality" papers such as *De Volkskrant*. The parallel indicates that dogs might perform the same function as ordinary people in those newspapers to increase the familiarity of a

subject. This showed again how a dog is valued as ordinary in Dutch society. Interestingly, Facebook seemed to take the trend of "popular" newspapers even further, with a strong emphasis on a concrete role for the dog, whereas abstract references were practically absent.

High scores in several categories can be accounted for by seasonal differences. Examples in July included more dogs suffering from heat in cars and the nuisance of roaming dogs at big cycling events. This was also observed in the high score for human – dog relationships in October as *Dierendag* (Animal Day) is celebrated on 4 October in The Netherlands and newspapers reported on this.

Remarkably, categories relating to many of the problems that arise in relation to dogs were virtually lacking. Topics like hereditary diseases related to dog breeding occurred only once; zoonotic diseases and illegal trade also occurred rarely. Interestingly, these subjects did come up when people were asked to name negative aspect of interaction with nonhuman animals, as was done in a Dutch study in 2012 (de Cock Buning et al., 2012). This could mean that people were aware of problems on a conscious level when asked to use a deliberate level of thinking, but were not confronted with them in everyday life, where the fast, automatic, and effortless operating system of our brain has more impact on decision-making (Kahneman, 2012). It could also mean that the costs of actively processing this information were too high compared to a situation where the information is already provided, therefore making it a less desirable option to consider in value-based choices (Berkman et al., 2017). This may have implications for situations where a dog is acquired without careful consideration.

One can question whether Dutch society is actively aware of, or interested in, the problems surrounding dogs. To numerous stakeholders, who range from individual dog lovers to animal rights groups, political parties, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, and of course, the dogs themselves, these problems are quite pressing. As the efforts to educate people about dogs are not reducing the problems, could this be a sign that ordinary people view dogs so much as an ordinary part of life that they do not pay specific attention to them, thereby ignoring the problems? The norms found in the qualitative analysis indicated otherwise: dogs' needs must be met; when dogs' rights are endangered, strong punishment should be applied; and dog keepers or circumstances should prevent problems with dogs. These norms were derived from a value that seemed to be more variable than the norms were. As research shows, 24% of Dutch people consider nonhuman animals to be equal to humans (Kantar Public, 2018), and, although 76% think otherwise, there is still a strong claim for the rights of nonhuman animals and the protection of

those rights. The variability in values in thinking about nonhuman animals is a known phenomenon in Dutch society (Cohen et al., 2012), and this study affirms that variability, specifically on the topic of dogs.

An underlying value with less or no variability was the importance of consideration toward dogs. When relationships between humans and dogs were described, when abuse of dogs was mentioned, and even when the dog was portrayed as a source of nuisance, in most cases there was consideration for dogs and their needs. There was also no debate about the responsibility of people rather than dogs, but how responsibility was understood according to norms when it came to off-leash walking or restrictions for dogs was much more variable. People stated that it is necessary for the dog's wellbeing to be able to run free, and to prevent the dog from becoming a nuisance by burning energy, but at the same time there was a call to keep dogs on the leash to prevent nuisance.

The predominantly positive view of the dog could account for the underestimation of the difficulties in dog keeping, especially with so little attention paid to the problems with and for dogs. When dog problems are always attributed to dog keepers or circumstances, people may assume that the problems are easily avoidable as they have control over them themselves or are not to blame. This could lead to regulations being regarded as unfair if they affect the dog when the keeper is to blame. A lack of knowledge of dogs can combine with high self-confidence on the subject, a phenomenon known as the Dunning-Kruger effect (Dunning, 2011), in which less competent people are unaware of their own ignorance, and thus do not seek assistance or information (Ehrlinger et al, 2008).

Limitations

Using newspapers and Facebook as indicators for values and norms in Dutch society may risk an overly limited view of values and norms. As both media are written media, the possibility cannot be ruled out that oral media would provide more or different values and norms. Advantages of studying written media included the accessibility of archives and the lack of interference from, for instance, nonverbal and paraverbal communication, as would have to be taken into account with oral media. As society is moving toward more written communication because of the rise in social media use (Van der Veer et al., 2018), it can be expected that these findings will increase in importance. This study may also be relevant for use in other countries, where there may be either a comparable role for dogs or a significant contrast. As it is possible that other values and norms exist in Dutch society regarding dogs, in-depth interviews are suggested for a future study.

Further research on the way people may be affected by public opinions when acquiring a dog will provide insight into the significance of the values and norms found for acquisition behavior and their potential as an agent of influence. Additionally, interviewees could be confronted with the less frequently mentioned problems with dogs to get an indication of whether their reaction to those problems follows the norms found.

Conclusion

The quantitative analysis conducted provides interesting data on public opinions concerning dogs in The Netherlands. The normalcy category and the use of dogs in proverbs and metaphors indicate how ordinary dogs are perceived to be in The Netherlands. Between 2007 and 2017, specific values regarding dogs were found: Dogs are considered close to humans, and dogs are ordinary.

The norms found relate to the value of dogs being close to humans:
– Dogs' needs must be met.
– When dogs' rights are endangered, strong punishment should be applied to those endangering these rights.
– Dog keepers or circumstances are to blame for problems surrounding dogs.

As people are confronted with a neutral to positive image of dogs in Dutch media, it is easy to overlook the problems that can occur. Finding ways to balance the picture will be a future challenge for everyone aiming for better welfare for both dogs and humans.

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